



National Security Working Group

The War on Terror Continues: The Christmas Day Bomber
Congressman Tom Price (R-GA), RSC Chairman
Congressman Trent Franks (R-AZ), NSWG Chairman

What happened?

- On December 25, 2009, a 23-year-old Nigerian, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, set off an explosive device strapped to his body while traveling on Northwest Flight 253 from Amsterdam to Detroit. His trip originated in Nigeria. Though fellow passengers and air crew intervened, only a technical glitch prevented the explosives from fully detonating.
- Preliminary FBI analysis identified the powdery explosive substance as (pentaerythritol). PETN is used in small caliber ammunition and detonator charges, and heart disease medicine. This highly explosive powder was sewn into Abdulmutallab's underwear along with a syringe filled with chemicals used to ignite the explosives.
- Abdulmutallab claimed ties to [Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula \(AQAP\)](#), including training in an Al-Qaeda training camp in Yemen. He said that the explosive device was acquired in Yemen with instructions on its use. On Dec 27, 2009, AQAP claimed responsibility for the bombing attempt, saying it was in retaliation for December airstrikes against it. On Jan 2, 2010, President Obama confirmed that Al-Qaeda in Yemen sponsored the bombing attempt.



Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

- The Al-Qaeda wing in Yemen that claimed responsibility for the attempted bombing last week of a Northwest Airlines flight has as many as 2,000 militants and sympathizers exploiting the country's economic and political chaos to create a base for violent jihad at the edge of the Persian Gulf, according to a Yemeni terrorism expert.
- The group, known as "Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula" is the latest iteration of Islamist militant cells that have been active in Yemen for years. The country has been home to extremists for wars against America in Iraq and Afghanistan, and for terrorist networks stretching from North Africa to Europe. Yemen, the Arab world's poorest nation, is currently ruled by a very weak central government that primarily only controls its capital city. Some analysts fear Al-Qaeda will take advantage of Yemen's instability to not only inspire additional radicals, it will also attract them to join an evolving extremist front in the Middle East including potential neighboring nations

like Saudi Arabia.

- "They were once just a group of radicals in Yemen looking to its mother in Afghanistan for advice," [Saeed Ali O. Jemhi](#), an expert on militant groups, said in a recent interview in the Yemeni capital, Sana. "But the group's leadership in Yemen has improved. They have clear ideological and strategic plans, and they were strengthened early in 2009 by a merger of Saudi and Yemen Al-Qaeda branches."
- The group said on its website that it was behind the Christmas Day attempt to blow up a flight en route to Detroit from Amsterdam. It said the plot was retaliation for U.S. assistance to Yemen's military, which in recent weeks has launched airstrikes on training camps and safe houses that killed as many as 60 suspected Al-Qaeda members.

Problems in Yemen

- The risk Al-Qaeda poses in Yemen has long been of concern to Western intelligence services. In 2000, Yemeni suicide bombers killed 17 people when they struck the USS Cole. The U.S. waged a largely successful counter-terrorism campaign over the next three years, using unmanned drones to kill key operatives. But in the past three years, AQAP has been thriving again in eastern Yemen, amid the ravages of its civil war.
- Western intelligence chiefs believe the risk posed by Yemeni militant jihadists has become especially serious. About 100 Yemenis have been held in the Guantánamo Bay detention centre since 2002. Yemen's foreign minister said last year that the country hosted 1,000 Al-Qaeda militants.

A Failure of Intelligence

- Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano [said](#) Sunday that the thwarting of the attempt to blow up an Amsterdam-Detroit airline flight Christmas Day demonstrated that "the system worked." She also added there was, "no suggestion that [the suspect] was improperly screened." Her denial of the obvious is stunning.
- On Nov 19, 2009, [Abdulmutallab's father](#)—a prominent Nigerian banker—met with U.S. Embassy officials in Nigeria, to relay concerns about his son's extremist ties. As a result, Abdulmutallab was placed on an intelligence database that includes people with suspected terrorist ties. However, without further "compelling reasons" he was not placed on any additional terrorist watch lists or Homeland Security "no fly" lists. **Furthermore, the State Department determined the information was insufficient to revoke Abdulmutallab's U.S. visa, despite the U.K. having previously denied him a student visa.**
- "It now appears that weeks ago this information was passed to a component of our intelligence community but was not effectively distributed so as to get the suspect's name on a no-fly list," [President Obama](#) said of the father's warning. "There appears to be other deficiencies as well. Even without this one report, there were bits of information available within the intelligence community that could have and should have been pieced together."
- According to reports, White House counterterrorism officials received intelligence about Al-Qaeda's use of the underwear bomb technique in late August/early September. About four months before the attempted bombing, the National Security Agency intercepted telephone conversations in which AQAP leaders talked about the possibility of using an unidentified "Nigerian" bomber in an attack.

What next?

- In order to successfully combat Islamic militants, the Obama administration must have the clarity and conviction to acknowledge that America is at war with men and women who ascribe to a militant form of Islam. He must

reform his own administration's policy of treating terrorists as though they are common criminals and entitled to full Constitutional protections.

- While the President has committed to using “every element of our national power to keep Americans safe,” that commitment is hollow unless he reverses several decisions made during his first year in office.
- The Christmas Day bomber Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab should be designated as an unprivileged enemy belligerent and detained and prosecuted consistent with laws of armed conflict—not the criminal justice system. Yet, President Obama immediately determined the Christmas Day bomber would be tried in an American civilian court, where he would be afforded the full protections Americans receive under the U.S. Constitution. This shows the Obama administrations obsession with protecting "civil rights" at the expense of national security. **Most Americans agree with the writer who quipped, "My favorite civil liberty is the one that says I get to not be blown up."**
- [A new Rasmussen poll](#) shows 71% of all voters think the attempt by the Nigerian Muslim to blow up the airliner as it landed in Detroit should be investigated by military authorities as a terrorist act. The same poll showed that 79% of voters now believe there will be another terrorist attack in America in the next year.
- The President should immediately reverse his administration's decision to try 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and his cohorts in a federal court in New York City, thus denying Al-Qaeda the fertile recruiting forum of a public trial.
- In addition, the President must reverse his decision to close Guantanamo and rescind his subsequent announcement that the terrorists held there will be moved into the United States heartland. Moreover, the President should repudiate his own statement that the existence of Guantanamo spurred the creation of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Al-Qaeda has operated in Yemen for over a decade. All Americans remember that it was Al-Qaeda terrorists who killed 17 sailors with the bombing of the USS Cole in Yemen in 2000. Other attacks launched by Al-Qaeda through Yemen include the 1998 bombings of two U.S. embassies in East Africa.

For more information please see:

Charles Krauthammer:

<http://article.nationalreview.com/?q=ZWI2MGE2YTE4MzM4M2QyMTE5ZWE0OWI0Y2E3OTZiMGU=>

In the News & Heritage Foundation Background:

http://www.politico.com/static/PPM145_letter.html

<http://www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/wm2750.cfm>

<http://www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/wm2751.cfm>

<http://corner.nationalreview.com/post/?q=ZjdLOTU5OTkyNDhmYmI0MDc1MTM1ZjI5MTFkOTNkNmY=>

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